



The Safe Traveler Bulletin

Health information to guide Commonwealth travelers on how to prevent illness for themselves and communities while traveling.

Welcome

This issue of *The Safe Traveler Bulletin* is filled with five-star health information for travelers. Sometimes called the “stomach flu,” norovirus, is a common virus that spreads quickly and easily. You will find tips on choosing safe food and drink while traveling. If you are traveling close to home, your risk of being bitten by a tick in PA increases in late spring, so check out the Lyme disease conversation. And, there are COVID-19 tips for when your travels take you far from home.

Norovirus: Not Only a Cruise Ship Virus

Norovirus is a virus that causes diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach pain. Fever and body aches are possible, too. Noroviruses are found in the poop or vomit of infected people. Only few virus particles are enough to make someone sick, and they spread easily on hands, surfaces, food, and in water. Symptoms usually begin 12 to 48 hours after a person has come in contact with the virus and last for 1 to 3 days. Avoid others as soon as you feel sick until you have been well for at least three days.

You may have heard [norovirus](#) called the “cruise ship virus” because it can be challenging to control in close quarters and shared dining areas. Yet, 99% of all norovirus outbreaks happen on land. A recent upswing in norovirus cases may seem alarming to travelers, but simple actions can keep you healthy. Norovirus infection is a risk to people of all ages and is common in places where people are close together and touch the same surfaces. Groups sick with norovirus, which are called outbreaks, can also spread easily at common travel destinations such as hotels, camps, and resorts.

Tips to increase your chances of a healthy vacation.

Travelers can protect themselves and others by wiping down surfaces and washing their hands with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before eating or preparing food. Thoroughly wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating them. And, it is important to note that hand sanitizers do not work well against norovirus.

There is no vaccine for norovirus. It cannot be treated with [antibiotics](#) because it is a viral, not bacterial, infection. If you are sick, you can treat the symptoms with over-the-counter medications and should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid lost from vomiting and diarrhea, this will prevent dehydration.

CHOOSE SAFE FOODS AND DRINKS WHEN TRAVELING

Unsafe foods or drinks are common causes of traveler's diarrhea and other diseases that may disrupt your travel plans.

Check out [Destinations | Travelers' Health | CDC](#) so that you can make good choices and reduce your chances of getting sick from what you eat or drink.

 Usually Safe To Eat	 Dry, Packaged, and Foods Served Hot	 Usually Safe To Drink	 Hot Drinks, Alcohol, Pasteurized Milk, and Sealed Drinks
 Can Be Risky To Eat	 Raw Foods, Street Food, and Local Wild Game (i.e. bat, monkey or rodent)	 Can Be Risky To Drink	 Ice, Tap Water, Fountain Drinks, and Freshly Squeezed Drinks

What to know about Lyme disease

You don't have to travel far to be bitten by the black-legged tick, also known as the deer tick, that can cause Lyme disease. Leah Lind, with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, says you are at risk simply by spending time in your backyard. She goes on to explain that the backyard is where most tick bites occur. This is because deer ticks are found in every county in Pennsylvania, even in green spaces in urban areas. However, not all deer ticks spread Lyme disease, only ticks infected with the bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Due to the high volume of infected ticks, Lyme disease is one of the most common infectious diseases in the Commonwealth.

Lyme disease is spread when someone is bitten by an infected deer tick. The disease can cause flu-like symptoms and a round or oval rash, sometimes resembling a bull's eye, in the early stages, but can progress to joints, the nervous system, and heart conditions if it is not treated. Lyme disease is diagnosed based on symptoms, physical findings (such as a rash), or lab testing. Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics. Although a vaccine is not currently available to prevent infection, a Lyme vaccine is expected in the coming years. That's why, Lind says, the best form of protection is prevention.

If you are traveling in PA or to other locations where Lyme disease is found, protect yourself and your loved ones by investing in clothing, tents, and other belongings that have been pretreated with or contain the insecticide permethrin. You can also purchase 0.5% permethrin and treat your clothing, shoes, and gear yourself. This insecticide instantly kills bugs on contact and prevents you from being bitten. Lind also recommends examining yourself and others from time to time when outdoors, and a thorough tick check should be conducted after spending time outdoors. If traveling across the US, check beforehand to learn if Lyme disease is found in the area you will be visiting. Lyme disease is commonly found in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Upper Midwest of the United States including Wisconsin and Minnesota. [Surveillance Data | Lyme Disease | CDC](#)

It is also important to consider that pets and farm animals are also at risk for Lyme disease and discussing tick prevention products with your veterinarian is a conversation worth having. Although there is no vaccine for humans, dogs may be vaccinated for Lyme disease.

- For more information visit [Lyme \(pa.gov\)](#)
- Need to be tested for Lyme disease, but cannot cover the cost? [Find a Health Center \(hrsa.gov\)](#)

What to do: If you get COVID-19 while far from home

COVID-19 is still a part of our reality. Being prepared for the possibility of getting COVID-19 while you're away will make things a little less stressful, not to mention safer.

Your plan for what to do should you test positive for COVID while traveling begins before you leave home. As you make arrangements, ask your lodging and transportation representatives about COVID policies, including testing resources and isolation restrictions.

While the desire to get home as soon as possible is understandable when sick, the opposite is true, especially when traveling with others. The most important thing to do is to separate yourself from everyone else in your party to help minimize your risk of spreading the virus. Know whether your destination requires isolation in a facility of their choice and contact your tour operator or hotel to determine what protocols they have in place should you test positive.

Once you know what to expect, you can begin to plan accordingly. Pack and prepare for your trip as if you'll be faced with an extended stay if you become sick.



Get vaccinated and boosted. Vaccinating against COVID-19 is the best way to protect yourself from the virus. If you're eligible for a booster, roll up your sleeve before departing.



Pack self-tests and high-quality (N95 or KN95) masks. Carry a supply of masks, tests, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes. Bring along a thermometer so you can check for fever.



Pack essentials. If you test positive for COVID-19 while traveling, you may need to isolate from others. Make sure you pack medications, toiletries and clothes for a few extra days.



Have easy access to your online medical records. If you would need to anti-viral treatments (Paxlovid), info about your health issues or medications might be needed.



Research how to get medical care. What medical care would be available if you would become really sick while away? See if you can get the answer from a local source in advance.



Purchase travel insurance. Before traveling, consider buying travel insurance and medical benefits that cover COVID-19 and include isolation costs, medical, and transportation expenses.



Be prepared financially. Put aside some extra money for your trip in case you test positive, to spend on additional nights at a hotel, and unexpected health-care costs.